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TAGS: PREL MOPS KPKO DJ SO AU

SUBJECT: USAU: DJIBOUTIAN LEADER DISCUSSES TROOP COMMITMENT
TO AMISOM

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 127

1B. DJIBOUTI 52

Classified By: USAU AMBASSADOR MICHAEL A. BATTLE, REASONS 1.4 (A), (B),
AND (D).

This message is from USAU Ambassador Michael A. Battle.

11. (C) On the margins of the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa on February 1, Djiboutian President Ismael Omar Guelleh and Foreign Minister Mahamoud Ali Youssouf reviewed with USAU A/DCM the Government of Djibouti's plan for deploying troops to Somalia as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Guelleh said the GODJ is "considering" the use of three battalions. (Note: Both Guelleh and FM Youssouf used the figure of 500 per battalion, whereas reftels cited numbers approximating 450 and 465. End Note.). Guelleh said the first battalion would be deployed to Mogadishu, and a second battalion would be used to reinforce the first, if needed. Guelleh did not specify whether the reinforcement battalion would be based in Djibouti or somewhere in Somalia. He also spoke of a third (rotation) battalion of 500 soldiers.

12. (C) In the ensuing exchange, which took place outside partitioned cubicles where the U.S. and Djiboutian delegations were holding their respective bilateral meetings, Guelleh went on to characterize Mogadishu as a very different battleground, one that required significantly better equipment and training for troops being deployed there. Guelleh made references to urban warfare and guerrilla tactics. He also said it would be important to receive U.S. Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) support for Djibouti, echoing his message to Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Alexander Vershbow during his visit to Djibouti on January 24 (ref A). Guelleh and Youssouf acknowledged that it would be irresponsible for the GODJ to send troops into Mogadishu without readying them for the unique conditions they would face.

13. (C) AU Chairperson Jean Ping, who has personally appealed to African heads of state to contribute troops to AMISOM, has announced publicly that Djibouti would be sending 450 troops to AMISOM. Ping has yet to state publicly that the GODJ's contribution may actually be larger.

14. (C) On a purely domestic political note, Guelleh responded to a question about the coming presidential election in Djibouti by saying with confidence that he was looking forward to the campaign and that it would be competitive.
YATES